

Fall & Winter 2009

Aubade





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"Besides the Autumn poets sing,
A few prosaic days
A little this side of the snow
And that side of the Haze -"

Emily Dickinson

Aubade

Fall & Winter 2009

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Mission Statement

The Aubade is the University of Mary Washington's semi-annual review of art and literature. We seek to showcase the best of what the artistic community at the University of Mary Washington has to offer. All submissions are judged anonymously by the reading staff and editors of the Aubade. Submissions should be sent to aubadeumw@gmail.com.

Letter from the Editor

If your everyday life seems poor, do not blame it; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is no poverty and no poor, indifferent place.

— Rainer Marie Rilke *Letters to a Young Poet*

The job of the poet, of the artist, is to shape experience into beauty, to find worth in each moment, even the moments that seem impossible or unbearable. I truly believe that the University of Mary Washington is home to some of the most able young thinkers and artists and I am proud to know that I am among them. This year's Fall & Winter issue of Aubade showcases how these individuals have taken a variety of experience and called forth the riches Rilke suggests may be found by those talented and determined enough to discover them. Through an exciting and diverse array of theme and medium, Aubade unveils these discoveries.

In this issue Aubade has undergone some fairly radical design changes. It is our hope to display student work in the best and most engaging manner as the students have worked hard to be published and deserve to be presented in a way that mimics the quality of that work. The editors are all very excited about these changes and hope that readers will be as thrilled as we are.

As always, it is not just the work of the dedicated reading and editorial staff that makes the magazine a success, but the effort and encouragement of those behind the scene. Aubade would like to extend a special thanks to Joe Mollo and the entire OSACS team for their constant support and work to make Aubade available to the entire UMW community. We would also like to thank our faculty advisor, Claudia Emerson, for her guidance and inspiring persistence in encouraging the creative arts. And lastly, gratitude goes to Michael Vaillancourt for his dedication to our project.

On a personal note, I am delighted to assume for the first time the role and responsibilities of Aubade's Editor-in-Chief. Having been a member of Aubade's reading staff for the past three years I have seen the magazine change and grow. My hope is to continue nurturing what has been and continues to be a beautiful exhibition of the talent and passion that scatters and colors our campus. Thank you for being a part of it.

Chelsea Newnam
Editor-in-Chief

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*Aubade would like to extend a formal apology to Everett Bartlett for printing "Saxony's Second Sonnet" under another name in last year's Spring 2009 issue. The poem is reprinted here under the correct name.

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Of growth & herbs

by Brad Efford

It's unclear who to address this to:
skin sturdy & thin whose shadows
embrace the sunlight, or the sun,
composed donor of years not asking
but to be received. Perhaps the web
of roots, directionless, sprouting
downward into soil, or
the soiled sprig of stem swaying
frightened by the breeze. It could be
its leaves so fragile to be torn
by breath, or my own I hold to watch
them grow, pretending I am rooted,
shaking, sun-grown too.



Teton Sunrise by Charlottle Sandy

The Lullaby

by Jessica Barefoot

Every Christmas, my mother offers my Grandmother a glass of eggnog. Routinely, she chuckles, raises the bottle to her lips, and pretends to take a swig, the laughter of my mother and me urging her on. My grandmother was from a family of drinkers. At least three of her brothers were far too fond of the bottle. Perhaps that is why Grandma never took to it herself. She was too strong for such things. She didn't need alcohol to rile her up. It came to her naturally.

Every Christmas, my family always gathers at my grandma's house to exchange Christmas gifts. We bustle through the creaking screen door of her home, knocking bags overflowing with presents against the doorframe as we enter. We see Grandma, clad in a holiday turtleneck, adorned with miniature candy canes at the collar, do-it yourself white Capri pants, and an Ace knee bandage on her right leg. As I tower over her petite frame, I notice dark specks of hair coloring residue nestled comfortably within her stiffly sprayed gray locks.

"Come give Grandma a little hug," she says, taking no notice of the fact that I am loaded down like a wise man bearing treasures.

"Could I put this stuff down first, Granny?" I ask, exasperated.

"Oh sure honey, go right ahead. Straight on back to your Mama's old room." She stops me in mid gait to hug me anyway. I halt in annoyance. Once moving again, I pass by the living room and notice the rest of our family already seated with expectant looks on their faces. Uncle Johnny, wearing his usual stern expression, Aunt Stacey, her head jerking swiftly in the direction of any movement within eyesight, my cousins Justin and Shelby, their bodies slouched, their youthful faces plastered with boredom. But these faces were all Grandma wanted for Christmas. She wrapped herself up in the lives of her children and grandchildren. She had long awaited a day such as this, a day we could all come together as a family. It rarely ever happened. Therefore, on Christmas day, my grandmother's tired face shone as brightly as the star guiding well wishers to Jesus' manger. Her happiness illuminated the room. It came to her naturally.

Every Christmas, without fail, the ceremonious opening of the presents is a carbon copy of those that have come before it. Grandma freezes a smile on her face as she doles out the lovingly packaged gifts she has carefully selected for each of us. Caution to the wind, my younger cousin speedily snatches her treasures from Granny's knotted fingers and plunges into her annual quest of seeing how hastily she can manage to extricate her package. Across the room,

my aunt can be heard laughing exuberantly at a joke she just made. My uncle eyes the rest of us with a “isn’t she cute” grin on his face. My mother struggles a half-hearted smile, then looks away. Then, just before my step-father has a chance to pry away the heavily scotch-taped tissue paper from his parcel, revealing his Dollar General wonder, Grandma bellows from across the room.

“Craig, I sure hope you like the sweater. I thought the navy blue would look good on you.”

And just like that, the surprise is ruined. My uncle’s scowl slowly turns to a lopsided grin. Aunt Stacey produces a hoot of glee that could wake the dead. My five year old sister begins to prance proudly around the living room, certain the laughter is directed towards her. My grandmother just sits there in a straight backed wooden chair, a look of simultaneous embarrassment and pleasure sweeping her aged face. She has made the same mistake in years past and has once again allowed her excitement to get the best of her. She is the source of our merriment, the reason behind our fleeting moment of Christmas cheer. Once again, she plays the clown, the fool, just to see us smile. She folds her hands in her lap as we continue to laugh.

Every Christmas, I am gently rocked by the lullaby of my grandmother’s fiddling and tittering around me. Sitting in her battered and time-worn brown recliner after devouring lovingly concocted platefuls of tough turkey legs, slightly burnt macaroni, and salt doused mashed potatoes, I allow my stuffed body to relax as Grandma hastily hobbles back and forth in the kitchen, her bandaged knee cracking under her weight, attempting to straighten up the disarray that our family has conveniently left for her to tidy. I strain to hear her voice, allowing for her distant mutterings to seep into my brain, to nestle into my being. I take her in. I hear her, in hushed tones, relaying to my mother a detailed account of a conflict she witnessed between the members of the social committee at her church Sunday morning. I hear her voice rise and fall with exaggerated and well-practiced skill as she attempts to thrust the rest of the leftover ham biscuits into my step-father’s firmly clinched hands. I hear her, with mock urgency, inform my mother that I am much too slender, commanding her to jam me full with meats and carbohydrates in hopes of escalating my pants size from a 4 to an 8 at least. I close my eyes as Grandma speaks. Her pitch escalates and descends, corresponding to the tales she conveys, yet even her shrillest moments soothe me. She is a sudden cool breeze on a smoldering August afternoon. She is the faithful hand scratching my back as I bury my head into my pillow at night and the crackling voice of a story before bed. She would not let you down. She is quintessential passivity, but, when least expected, a force to be reckoned with. I can feel her presence. As Grandma’s voice drones on in the next room, my body relaxes, my head begins to nod. Her words are more than a lullaby. They are a hymn of peace. 

Summer's Last

by Helen Alston

The plum bled out, its redness turning each
long finger syrup-sweet. A knife, this thin
and hardy little thing, she used to breach
the ripened fruit. An artful twist: a fold of skin

drew back to show the pit, more white than it
had any right to be, held fast inside
the dark new muscle of the gage. She split
the seed, the fleshy center open wide.

The pit rolled out, forgotten as it dropped, found
later near the fridge or by a mug, an
errant kernel. Greedy-mouthed, lips around
the fruit, she let her teeth sink in, began

her final feast: the juice, the skin against
her tongue! Before she knew, the fruit was gone.
The liquid purpled on her hands. She sensed
that autumn would arrive before too long.

For
Queen
Nefertiti
by Chelsea Newnam

Three thousand years and men are still
chipping at your exterior, trying to break
apart and scan through your sure surface. In time
they dissolve and dissect the smooth beauty
of your face to place under light lenses
and scopes until your stucco reveals stress
and imperfection. Though you have long been cast
to the sun-disc god you attended with reverence,
the world delights in the resurrection
of your wrinkles and serves your memory
with a rude reminder that women age
no matter if their hearts
emerge from limestone.

Newnam

by Helen Alston

Her little moon-face, like mine but softer,
her hair, still clean like a baby's, eyes wide
and merry in the gloom. The logs
in our fireplace were set alight
at the first sign of cold. Light blurred
summer freckles that had yet to dim in her cheeks.

We had made angels from the first snow
only a week before, yet our Fraser pine
stood tall in the corner awaiting the presents
that would lie at its foot in the morning.
My sister's hands, still chalky with cookie flour,
grasped mine as she pulled me to my feet.

We held each other at arms' length and turned,
spinning the breath out of each other, our laughter
a single wild exclamation. I couldn't see her,
only a heavy darkness where she might
have been. I will never know

who let go first,
only that she fell out of my hands, only
the sound of a skull crack against the fireplace -
only the blood, the deep red of Christmas.
That was the biggest scar
I would ever give her.



KKY at Great Falls by Sarah Kountz

Kountz

by Stephanie Mack

Sorry, Dollface

We, the three bridesmaids and three groomsmen, were huddled in a circle on the far end of a bridge in Northwood Park that was intended to be used as the aisle in the outdoor wedding, when the sky began to grow grey overhead. Gil was in the middle of fixing his lighter and explaining to us how he was adjusting his perspective on the situation, "I think it's just because I am a cynic by nature," he said, "but those two are different, and they're perfect together, so why wait? I guess."

Realistically Amanda's marriage won't last until the end of college, but it's fun just to pretend. I'm sure that is what Liza would have whispered in my ear if she were standing there right then, just to lighten the mood. She'd also have told me that I don't really need the anxiety medication. I got along reasonably well without it before, and all it does is crash my libido anyway. Or is that what I told myself? Either way, I didn't take my 15 milligrams that day, just to make sure that I didn't have the side effects, blurred vision, brain zaps, and mild headache while I was walking down the aisle with my groomsman.

Beth, a bridesmaid like me, made a guttural noise and looked away, up at the sky. Light showers and gusty wind in the morning were part of the day's forecast. It was 10:50, forty minutes until the ceremony commenced. The wind blew in short startling bursts, ripping the powder blue ribbons from the trunks of the pine trees. The hired violinist was chasing them down, looking about and wondering probably the same thing that the rest of the wedding party was wondering: where were the bride and groom? They were back at the little white wedding chapel, the rain location. I was sure of that. Any minute now, one of the groomsmen was going to receive a text telling us to dismantle the chuppah, cram the foldout guest chairs into the van, and round up everyone to go to the church. I wasn't worried about the bride and groom. They were levelheaded people. Rain would not shake them. Liza had not called yet though, like she promised me, and my fingernails were starting to feel numb from holding my cell phone so tightly. It was probably the cold drizzle falling from the sky that was making my hands chilly as well. This was not the light rain the weatherman had promised.

"Oh, fun." Beth snapped open her matching powder blue clutch and took out her own cell phone "I'm not waiting for you any longer," she said in a singsong voice as she dialed the bride's number.

The other bridesmaid made an effort to catch my eye, but I glanced down at my phone. 10:55 and still no call. I wondered if she had lost her phone again.

Sometimes when she drank she handed her phone over to friends so that she wouldn't drunk-dial anyone from her hometown. But Liza wouldn't have been drinking. She had been alone on a road trip across the United States for the past six months. Amanda's wedding was the final destination.

The groomsmen prematurely began hoisting the chairs onto their shoulders and making for the car while Beth chattered on with the bride on the other line. What few wedding guests were still at the park saw this and filed toward the parking lot, talking jovially amongst themselves. Suddenly I had an unnerving realization; if we moved to the rain location, Liza would not be able to find us. She had not received an invitation in the mail detailing the course of the wedding events. She had no mailing address.

Beth hung up her phone and beamed as the rain poured down hard and sharp, drenching my dress from all sides. "Okay, let's all go," she yelled, hands cupped around her mouth so the groomsmen could hear her. "Pack everything into Gil's van before our dresses get soaked."

"Ladies," she said as an aside to the other bridesmaid and me "climb into Gil's car, quick. The boys will get the rest of the stuff. Remember to grab your bouquets."

We ran off the bridge and began trudging uphill to the car. My heels kept sliding down into the mud, caking my tights with mulch and allowing brown water to seep into the grooves of my shoes. I moved awkwardly to begin with, attempting to clutch my cell phone in my left hand while sheltering my daisy bouquet from the rain with the upper half of my dress, now almost completely soaked through. My left strap kept falling down, and each time I pushed it back into place I had to repress a nervous twinge at the uncoordinated ruin that was this wedding. Against the whistle of the wind, suddenly grown harsh, I heard faint music. It was "Jolene" by The Weepies. I wondered why someone would turn on the wedding playlist in this rain before stupidly realizing that the music was my own ringtone. 11:00 on the dot. The screen of my phone lit up in bright numbers that glowed against the droplets decorating its cover and the darkness of the park's forest trail. I fumbled with the items I held and managed to flip open my phone.

"Liza?"

"Dollface!" Liza's voice rang out over the receiver.

"Liza," I breathed heavily. We reached the van. Beth forced the sliding door open and we fell inside, tripping over one another and trying not to rip the hem of our dresses while sitting down.

I heard Liza laugh through the phone, and I continued. "Liza, how far away are you? It's raining so we have to go to this little chapel up the road. It's only like ten minutes from the other place — the park — we were at. I just- hello? Are you there?"

"Yes! Whoa, Nel. Slow down," she said. I could hear the same song, "Jolene," playing in the background on her car radio. It was freezing in our van. I tried to dry the lower half of my dress by fanning myself with a book of crossword puzzles I found on the floor.

Mack

She exhaled and continued, "I'm only about an hour outside of where you are, Dollface. It's raining like holy shit, but I met the nicest cop on my way down from Penn. Hold on. I have to roll up the window."

She had been smoking, I surmised. Then my brain caught up with what she had just said and I gasped into the phone, "Liza we don't have an hour! The wedding starts in thirty minutes!"

"Oops. Good thing Amanda didn't make me a bridesmaid then."

"Liza, I need you to be here, okay? I haven't seen you since August."

"Nel, it'll be fine. I'll make it. I'll speed," Liza said.

"No no! Please don't speed. You can't get in an accident on Amanda's wedding day."

"Maybe I'll get to meet Dan, the nice cop, again."

I could feel her smile through the phone.

One of the groomsmen slammed the trunk door down on all of the dripping wedding knickknacks. The other bridesmaids were using McDonald's napkins to dry off their arms and legs. I took one and did the same. Then the van's engine coughed and heaved until finally, we rolled across the moat surrounding the park and onto the main roadway.

"You still there?" Liza asked.

"Yeah, yeah!" I said eagerly.

I could hear shuffling on her end. She was either searching for cigarettes or words. Possibly both.

"I know I ran out on you guys after freshman year," Liza continued, "and I'm sorry, but I just couldn't cut it in this town."

"I know. I know," I hastily reassured her. I'd say anything to keep her on the line.

"So I will make it," she said, "Amanda is my friend too. I know I wasn't there for the proposal at the Homecoming dance. How is she? But wait, no shit, how are you? You've been keeping it cool right? No panic attacks?"

"I'm fine," In truth I was a bit taken aback that she had mentioned my anxiety.

"You've only seen that happen like twice."

"Yeah, and I never want to have to console you after getting an 88% on your Western Civ exam again."

"Sorry," I said, almost joking, "I know I'm a burden."

"No, Dollface. You're not a burden, and you know that. You three girls are my family. I won't be your absent deadbeat dad for much longer. Promise," she laughed.

There was a pause on the line while I searched for words myself, "Well."

"Well, what?" she said.

I spoke again, hushing my voice so that the groomsmen would not hear. I don't know why their judgment mattered to me, but it did. "You said you'd be at Beth's birthday party and you kind of never showed. And. Before that you couldn't make it to our party the weekend before fall break, so." My voice dropped off. Liza's enthusiasm, however, burst like a firecracker, "But I'm closer than ever, Nel! I promise we're gonna hug it out when I get there in, what was it?"

"Twenty-five minutes."

"Shit. Look, Nel," Liza said, "I'm hanging up now. I'll be there. Tell the rest of the party hi for me. Mwah. Bye."

The time of the ended call pulsated on my cell phone screen. Gil had turned on the heat a while ago. The wet patches of my dress that clung to my damp skin were drying unexpectedly fast, but my hands still felt cold. Ten minutes to drive to the church. Fifteen minutes until the vows.

The van rounded a corner and flew up onto the curb. It bumped around on the foliage of somebody's lawn before settling back onto the road. "Sorry!" Gil called out. "My van has really bad traction!"

We were jostled but no worse for wear when Beth said, "This weather is awful." She was kneading her fingers through her damp hair, attempting to bring her flattened curls back to life. "I should have come earlier with Amanda in her car to the chapel. She'll need me to do touchups now. God, I wonder if she was out in this. Her hair must be a mess. The veil will probably cover most of it though," she mused to herself.

Then she reached behind the seat to the back of the car where she materialized a clunky black stage makeup handbag and began rummaging through it. Beth was a theater major with a concentration in costuming. Last night, she had flown in from her internship in New York City where she was working with an off-Broadway company applying makeup for actors in Absurdist plays. She had been emailing Amanda and I and phoning Liza over the summer to tell us all about the people she had met and the connections she had made. Beth was ever brazen, demanding work ethic from her colleagues and time from Liza, something that I had never been able to do. What had I done this semester besides schoolwork and counseling sessions?

I should have taken off with Liza when she had filled up Jolene, her 1972 maroon Impala named after our favorite song, with as much gas as she could hold, and gotten the hell out of dodge. Since she left, Liza had been irregularly updating her traveler's blog, "Seeing America Right," with videos of flooded campgrounds and all-you-can-eat challenges at dive diners. She posted pictures of roadside attractions as she hit each state: Robert Johnson's Mississippi Blues Crossroads, The Spam Museum in Minnesota, Carhenge in Nebraska, The Cadillac Ranch in Texas. I wanted that. Did I want that? Gosh, I don't know. I did and I didn't. I guess I recognized the glamour and the danger, the expulsion of all reality, future expectations, friends, ties to the world. But what was any of that when you could have romance?

People with mothers who send college care packages each week containing candy and musical greeting cards along with your prescription medication don't travel across the country living without inhibitions, though. Nonetheless, Liza was the fixation that consumed my waking hours. In my fantasies, I'd be walking back to my dorm from class. Then suddenly Liza would round the corner of Phyllis Drive with enough force to rip up the pavement and send it arching rollercoaster-style through the air like in the old '90s cartoons. We would rush back to my room, throw some clothes into my laundry bag slapdash, and then we would hit the road. I'd experience a momentary relapse into practicality as we were racing

toward Jolene and say something like "But my political science paper! It's due tomorrow!" And Liza would grab my arm, pulling me forward faster, laughing. Sometimes in my dream I would be walking back from a club meeting late at night and she would accidentally run over some creep who was attempting to mug me. We would stare at each other in disbelief for several agonizing minutes before she would whisper in a voice full of trepidation yet slick as hell, taut and strange as London fog, "Get in."

My fantasies varied depending on impulse. Liza appeared differently every time too. Sometimes she wore the brown leather jacket she lifted from a department store in her hometown. Her hair could be long, short, wavy, anything. In all of our photos from freshman year, her hair had been different. Right before the road trip, it was a short flat blonde cut, but before that it had been everything from curly auburn to long and almond brown. When she first left, she had shaved it all off, saying, "Let's see where we go from here."

"It's hard to believe they only met a year ago," Gil chimed in from the passenger's seat.

"Yeah, I guess so," I suggested when I realized that his comment was aimed at me.

He turned around in his seat to face me and said "So, how did you guys meet anyway?"

"Well," I began, "It was in the summer before freshman year. My mom and I came to the university on visitor's weekend to check out the room that I was just assigned. But when I got there Liza and her mom were already inside. I guess they just liked my room better." I gave a short laugh.

"It was a corner room." I felt my lips peel back into a smile. "One of the first things she told me, other than her name, was her dream to build an orphanage in Haiti. Isn't that wild?"

"Yeah," he said slowly, tilting his head to the side. The others in the car were listening to our conversation as well. Beth was scrunching up her eyebrows in her own peculiar way of conveying confusion.

Gil continued. "Really? I thought Amanda said she met you through church or something like that."

My stomach twisted. Gil had inquired as to how I had met Amanda, my close friend who was about to be married in twenty minutes, and I had rambled on about Liza, a girl he had never even met.

I slapped my cold palm to my forehead "Sorry," I laughed, "My brain was somewhere else. Misinterpreted. Yeah, I did meet her through church. Episcopalian church. We're both Episcopalian."

"Are you sure that's the story you want to go with?" he folded his arms beneath his chin and leaned forward on the headrest. I assumed he was joking. Before he turned back around in his seat to adjust the heat, he winked at me. Beth turned in my direction and wiggled her eyebrows.

Luckily we arrived at the chapel soon thereafter. It was a quaint building. The paint was worn from the wooden panels around the long thin windows, and the church's old mailbox was bent almost parallel to the ground in a position

of exaggerated worship. A steeple rose up from the entranceway in that architectural style I knew only as "small southern town-esque." For a moment I was wholly caught up in the wedding. Only during the last few minutes of our car ride, did the rain cease. Now dew-choked atmosphere and bleak clouds and gave the place a sense of novelty and imbued us with a strange assurance that Amanda's love for her soon-to-be husband was impermeable. As I glanced down at my cell phone once again, I pinched the bridge of my nose, in an attempt to keep a tiny headache at bay. Thirteen minutes left and no follow-up call from Liza. But so what if she had lost her way? I would see her eventually. The headache moved from my frontal lobe to my temples. I walked up the stone path to the church, in step with the rest of the party, and took note of the tiny smooth pebbles that lined the way. Each was engraved with the names of couples married in this church.

Moving inside we observed that the interior was already decorated with soft blue ribbons and garlands of blue stain hibiscus draped in the rafters. We were free to mingle amongst ourselves for the next five minutes, keeping the bride out of sight of the groom until the ceremony began. Beth adjusted Amanda's veil and inspected the job she had done with Amanda's wedding makeup earlier that morning. Tilting the bride's head to one side, she expertly dabbed a blob of lip shimmer onto Amanda's mouth. I bit at the skin around the edges of my fingernails.

Should I be doing something to help? I asked myself. It was one of those situations where I had nothing of value to offer other than a warm smile, which I was able to fabricate easily enough. Amanda smiled back, but rather than set me at ease, her assuredness put knots in my stomach.

"By the way," she said, "Gil is going to be your new groomsman. He wanted to switch at the last minute."

Why did he have to do this? The order of day had been upset enough as it was. I asked her this, but I disguised my question so as to maintain the bubble of bliss surrounding the wedding.

She replied, "I don't know. You guys got to talking on the way over here, right? That's what he told me just now. And you never know, Nel. This is how people find each other and have weddings of their own."

She crinkled her nose as she beamed, turning her attention to a mirror on the wall and smoothing the beadwork on the front of her dress. I broke out in a cold sweat. Did she even care that one of our friends was still missing? Was I the only one who did?

There was a large clock on the wall. Ten minutes left.

Was I this out of sorts the first night Liza and I made our trek up to the confederate cemetery two miles from campus? She said she was going for a walk to smoke, and I had trailed behind her for the first few blocks before eventually pulling up alongside. It was dark long before we climbed up to the grassy knoll at the edge of the cemetery that loomed over an empty park. Seated on the wet ground, under the blank sky, we began talking. I told her about the anxiety I had dealt with ever since I was in elementary school.

"I used to panic in social situations. Before my senior year of high school, when I started taking mild anxiety medication, I found it difficult to even call people on the phone," I said.

"Jeez."

"No. I mean, I don't know. I know that's kind of extreme, but do you think I'm pathetic? I have this image in my head of the person I want to be, but I don't even think she is attainable." I was getting really down about myself, and I wasn't sure why I was even confiding in her. Who wants to be friends with someone who is so obviously troubled? "I just don't know if I'm good enough to accomplish much of anything in life."

She lit a cigarette and took a moment to absorb everything I had just said. After a few drags, she asked me, "If you're so worthless, how did you make it into a school like this?"

"I don't know," I replied, "It's just how I feel. I can't change it."

"Maybe it will change over time," she said, "I went to a therapist a couple of times actually. I haven't stuck with one for longer than a handful of sessions, but that's probably for the best. It's just good to talk to people. Get your fears out there. Maybe you should do that. The more people you meet, the more opinions you get, the better you feel about yourself."

I couldn't imagine Liza ever questioning her self-worth.

"I don't think you're worthless at all, Nel," she said, "I think you're the funniest human I have ever met." She was smiling like the moon was hiding behind her teeth.

In that moment, Liza had become my guardian angel, a Clove-smoking, voluptuous guardian angel with seven piercings and a heart the size of Texas—Liza's favorite state so far. There were supposed to be fireworks that night but they never showed. Maybe we had just gotten the date wrong.

Five minutes remained. I took my place at the end of the procession, as the organ played, and looped my arm through Gil's. My headache was beginning to pass, and a wave of optimism was breeching my dismal frame of mind. Liza would arrive soon whether she called or not. She had let me down before, but this time she had promised, and her word was realer to me than anything in this room.

Still, I tucked my cell phone beneath the ribbon of the bouquet I held in my right hand. I imagined that half way through the exchange of vows Liza would appear at the back of the church. I would look up, recognizing the smell of cigarettes on her jacket: stale yet sharp, repugnant, and yet almost flavorful as it settled in my lungs. Slouched against a wall, sunglasses in hand, she would wave to me, and I would wonder how she managed not to disrupt the ceremony at all when she stole inside the church like a whisper. She would be dressed like a superstar. Everything would be solid again. Amanda would not move out of our suite because Liza would do something extreme to make her stay. And the marriage that was about to happen would stop. Completely. Time would stand still, but we would be the only two people in the world who were unaffected. Then we would have time to just sit and talk like we used to. There were so many new things that I needed to tell her. My roommate and I are thinking of getting a cat. I stood

up the last boy who asked me out because I was too afraid he would hate me. I'm having doubts about my major. I don't know if my quality of work is good enough. Am I cutting loose enough? Am I living my life well enough? She would tell me. She would instantly rectify each one with a word.

"Ready to go?" Gil asked when it was our turn to walk down the aisle.

I nodded.

But just before we stepped out of the entryway, my bouquet gave a slight buzz. I discreetly pushed a button on the side of my phone to reveal Liza's text. It read: I know I promised. Sorry, Dollface.

The sensation in my hands deadened.

I suppose I must have gone pale because Gil whispered, "Don't look so nervous. You look like you're the one getting married."

We walked. Faces of relatives in pews fly by. My vision was hazy, so I don't recall much until we were almost at the altar. Groomsmen went right. Bridesmaids went left. Gil squeezed my hand before we parted, but I barely felt it. And when he let go I found myself stranded in the huge gulf between rows of smiling onlookers and the line of tearing bridesmaids. I moved forward with feet like lead and a heart like paper twisting in the wind. The bride was already moving behind me in her billowing veil like a beautiful ghost, and all eyes were on her. I had been abandoned again and again and again. Over and over until my trust was diluted. The Liza in my mind was a cinematic wash of a person I once knew, someone who had built me up only to let me down. I felt naked and ashamed that I was the only one of our friends left clutching to tattered fantasies, unable to move forward.

During the marriage ceremony I stood rigid among the other bridesmaids. I must have looked just like everyone else with tears in my eyes and a smile on my face. But it was the smile of a sad realization that all this time I had been leaning on something incorporeal. 



Homeward Bound by Charlotte Sandy

She drank me in
And began joking and choking me down
When she halted
On her spiral stare
Of browns and black
And her toes and colons
Slipped through cracks
Like knives
To strip her flesh in ribbons
And show her meat
And displayed her as cattle
With her ovaries strung up
Like cello strings
Set to be plucked and pulled
And played upon.
And all those different hands
Produced the same thing.
And her eyes
Connected mine like wire coated wine
In the pale red spotlight
Of jazz and blues
And poems scrawled around and through
Forgotten tunes
So I could feel
Every pen scratch
Dig into my flesh
Until there's nothing
But sockets gaping and remaining
Through and through
Only to fester and make sure my nerves
Were shot to ruin
Just so she'll expunge me
With the bile
And words
And woods to hide it all in.
The peace.
Then normalcy.

by Everett Bartlett

Bartlett



Old Gus by Nicole Kappatos

Photograph -

Grandad
by Helen Alston

The grey-brightness of the light through the window
caught the room right: pitted brown armchairs gone shiny
with use. Vinyl paneling gathering dust. Books stacked
two rows deep in their shelves. A rabbit eared television
tucked in a corner.

He sits like a piece of his own furniture,
ruddy-cheeked, eyes sea blue, lips parted. His teeth
are small and even as a dolphin's—not his first set.
His bird bone arms struggle against a thick cardigan.
Behind his head are picture frames full of children,
the same three faces grown or ungrown and repeated.

Not pictured: the lumps in his neck that brought
hoarseness, a walker, a nurse twice-daily; the wrinkles
at the corners of his mouth and eyes that dragged his
cheeks toward his chin; my hand
reaching for his for the last time.

Alston



by Chelsea Newnam

up sewn

We stitch ourselves together to contain
the cushion softness you abhor to see
and embroider the product that remains
so you appreciate our quality.
But if time stretches our elastic skin
and pleats and irons the folds about our eyes,
you reject the comfort of plush cotton
and trade our material for satin, silk, and lies.
You fabricate the reasons why we've frayed
so that we hold ourselves as sole to blame
and reconcile unraveling and stay
to surge the hem that – ripped – brings us to shame.
We crochet insides, pack them on a shelf
as we fake smiles and forget about ourselves.



It Dwarfs by Meredith Roane

Partially Cloudy with a Chance of Showers

by Erin Longbottom

Hanging from my knees
I shake my hair over your eyes,
laughing at the crab grass
tickling you through your shirt.

We watch meteors fall up
into blinking houses,
tying a wish to their tails,
wondering where they are travelling and
whether they remembered their passports.

I see one blazing rock shoot
off into the light smeared horizon,
It could be yours, finding a home
softly burning the sheets of a sleeping girl's bed.

You point out one hurtling close to us.
It thuds to the ground beside me and the raindropped
grass quiets it to embers and smoke, making the air thick
with root beer candy and burned laundry and the
orange flavored shampoo you use.

I reach my arm out, meaning to grab it,
but it has already fallen to ashes invisible in the dark,
the only reminder the flickering light in your eyes
and a soft smudge on my hands.

The houses are shutting their eyes
and my legs are falling asleep,
but you and I are awake, and I watch you tracing
invisible maps of Cancer and Leo, counting the falling
stars with the freckles on my arms.

Your astronomy is beyond me,
but my hands hang achingly close to yours.

Anodyne

by Ben Bower

A fan blade's dark weight swings where the light
Bulbs flashed
And the filaments cracked like
Fingers.
Starlight on shingles.
Broken windows.
Rough getting up again.

Bower

Salinity

by Everett Bartlett

You fought with the water,
deliberating whether to
hold your breath
until you drink the brine
and come back up full.
But your muscles would not
let you decide as your mouth 'laxed'
and your limbs failed to float.
The battering of waves
asked you with each blow
why your hands pollute the water.

They drag you out.
I wish your goosebumps were a braille
that I might read you
and need no explanation.

I long to gather up the
sea grass and wash
your feet clean of the salt.

This morning, I half-knew
we would not meet again.
Our long gaze did not deceive,
yet I let you drift out my door
like a blossom fallen on a stream.

I mutter in my sleep,
begging some favor of the sea-breeze.



The Holy Trinity by Margaret Kern



Hooligan Fishing by Ben Bower



one. morning in Maine

by Bob Bower

I remember the ruins of a hull and mast,
Dust-stripped and stretching out from behind rocks with iron
Shackles and bolts
And a flag that whipped like wave tips bending
And fleshing into deep, silent shadows where
Dogs quietly lick their feet until they fall asleep.

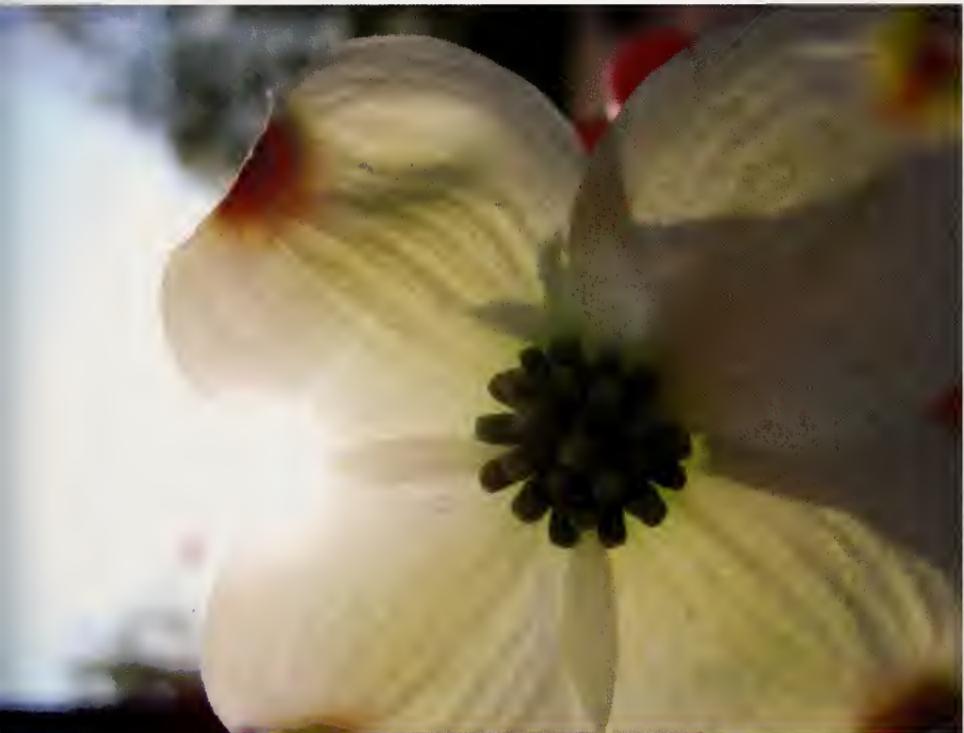
Bower

phoenix- flower

by Everett Bartlett



We who pick the flower,
press body upon body—
We who bring to nothing
that human beauty
which is only physical.
O let everything
be consumed by fire
in the hope that there
is some value left
in our essence which
might be raked from ash.



Let The Light Through by Meredith Roane

Roane

Elegy for the peaches in my pie

by Brad Efford
for *Annie Lee*

So perhaps it's unnatural or unkind
to shed the skins of fruits from their hearts
in the kitchen with the light off
and the moon spilling lazy across the floor

and the juices caked under our fingernails,
and what do we need light for
anyway? To embolden ourselves
like the one who picked these raw or the blade

of the saw in the peach tree's soft bark?
Or I suppose it could be the opposite:
a casual attempt at privacy
in an otherwise palpable world of pain

where today I heard a girl was stuffed into a wall
ten blocks from where my mother lives
in New Haven, in America,
in the mortar somehow in a way I can't think of

so maybe that only means the unnamed
killer's father was a mason or
maybe that he raised him to fear
looking at the moon or himself, afraid

that what he might see in both was pitted
and feared for him as well.

So perhaps this is enough and natural,
a darkening kitchen and a small serrated knife,
a way to make a pie and the only way we can,
trained at an early age to remember
what we understand and to teach it
to our loves, perhaps, is a given,
and the only gift we've been given in the end.

achates

by Everett Bartlett

You may find me, disarmed, though not back-broken or
bent as my pious friend will be. I may tire
atop the grey mountain but I know that without
me, he will have no one to witness his weeping.
There is no path savage enough that I may not
follow his feet; I who would trace his footsteps in
the sand if there were but two boughs of gold, two high
priests to lead. I who remain, unextinguished and
closed-mouthed, but always watching in case I must step
between his fair breast and the sweet tip of the spear.
None shall sing of me, but I will mark my place, leave
some traces of this life, even if only on
the west wind, whispered into the ears of those sharp
scholars whose minds my mimicry and shame will gnaw.

Poetry
by Colleen Trachy

Robert Frost always said the world would end
in fire. I can tell you it ended
with zombies.

April 17, 2009 sat
on the calendar.
I had a mind-bleaching
Shakespeare paper due by 5:00.

The clock telegraphed 3:06.
I was in class hunched
over a demanding table
in an awkward chair
trying to write a profound poem
about the connection between poetry
and the apocalypse.

Suddenly,
a comet whooped by with its entourage
of debris like a joy-riding sixteen year old.
The comet and its posse collided
with the ground, exploding
like a hydrogen bomb.

We watched the catastrophe
and then scrambled under the desks,
waiting for the fallout.

Headlines on the Internet read:
"World Takes Big Hit"
"Old Poets Rise from Graves like Zords on Power Rangers"
"Frost Takes 1.5 Million Lives in 3 Seconds"
"Emily Dickinson Assaults College with Anthrax Scare"
"Fortunately Hitler Still Dead"

I turned in my paper
and ran home. But I was captured
by the Anti-Zombie Squad
and joined their ranks
until they found out
I wrote some poems in school.

Life then fell
back to normal. Sort of.
I have a job as a waitress
in Poetry Bar #10540 off of Main Street.
I rake in passable money
though Shakespeare wrecked world economy
when he demanded to be paid
for the four hundred years his works were in the public domain.
He's now "King of the World."

I tell you, poetry readings are terrible now.
We have no free verse
and every Zombie poet keeps performing their greatest hits,
each one calling themselves
the Madonna of Dead Poets.

They don't craft anything new
or use modern phrases.
They're still good,
but not the same.

Oh, and I just heard Sylvia Plath committed
suicide. Again.
Third time this week! Who does she think she is?
Paris Hilton?!

by Ben Bower

Fruit Song

Bower

I want a woman with a mouth full of cherry pits
who will holler when I call her by her name

and

I want a woman with a house drowned in apple seeds
drawing sonnets on the bottoms of her feet

yes

I want a song about the sweet scent of cherry trees
dripping honey through the gaps between my teeth



Kern

Snow by Margaret Kern

The Color Yellow

by Amanda Wikle

I work in Hell.

It's cold down here. At least in my sector, anyways. I help stoke the furnaces. The warmth from the fire's comforting enough, but the chill from the cavern is never really lifted. That's just how it is underground though, I suppose. I wished I had a scarf sometimes, but I guess there's no point in worrying about things that you can't change. Scarves aren't in very high demand down here.

My name is Beedle. I work alongside two other imps named Needle and Tack. They're pretty quiet most of the time, but they're nice enough. The chill doesn't bother them like it bothers me. It must be because they're older. I'm not complaining, though.

I've only been up to Living Earth once.

I was laboring dutifully a couple weeks ago when my superior stepped in and loosened up his tie. His face and collar were flecked with soot and dust, and his narrow tail trailed behind him tiredly.

"I need someone to go up to the surface for Retrieval," he said. Needle and Tack kept shoveling. They'd been back and forth a bunch of times.

I stilled my spade. He was watching me expectantly.

"I'll go," I said. He smiled wearily and pulled out a slip of paper. I walked up, and he kneeled down to me.

"Thanks, Beedle. Here's what the man's name looks like. Give it a good look and you'll be fine."

He handed me the paper, and I watched. The scrawling on it began to disappear, and by the time it had, I'd learned the name.

"Got it?" he asked. I turned the folded scrap over and checked the other side. It was blank. Magic sure was odd sometimes.

"I think so."

"Good. I can send you up right away if you'd like."

I looked back to Needle and Tack. I caught them watching me, but they turned away.

"I would, I think," I said.

"Alright, then. Close your eyes."

< • >

I arrived on the surface in the middle of a city. It was bright out but I couldn't see the sun; the buildings were too tall and cramped. There were signs and billboards too, but I couldn't read them. The letters swam and turned to squiggles as I watched.

People walked past me on both sides. I glanced at their reflections in a window. A few quickened their pace and hiked up their shopping bags when they got near.

They couldn't see me.

I started on my way. I found a coin on the sidewalk after a while, and eventually came to a small boutique on a corner. A pair of haughty manikins stood in the window, bedecked in hats and bangles. Around their necks were patterned scarves.

I debated for a bit, then started toward the door optimistically. I had time.

A pair of girls stepped out before me. A bell chimed out above their heads, and I slipped inside before the door swung shut.

I made my way to the back. A rainbow of scarves was on display against the wall.

The shop was empty. Music groped at the atmosphere from a pair of nearly muted speakers, and the man at the front desk sat alone, his chin in his hand, playing cards on the computer.

Click, click.

I felt the scarves and pulled a few down, finally deciding on a yellow one because of the pattern in the knitting. I checked the price tag. More squiggles.

Surely the coin was enough. All human money was the same, anyway.

I slung the scarf about my neck and made my way up to the counter.

The clerk's eyebrows seemed to tense a bit as I got nearer, and he glanced at the clock against the wall.

Click...

I reached up and set my coin in the middle of the counter. He got up and stood, hovered, then moved towards the window. He fingered his pocket before pulling out his cell phone. I watched him, curious. He pushed some buttons.

I stepped back and wandered to the door.

"Hey, dear," he said sheepishly. "Oh. No, uh... I d'know. Just calling to say hi, I guess."

I pulled open the door. The bell above me didn't jingle.

"...How's your day going?"

< • >

The hospital was only a few blocks up the road, and I made it there in no time. Visitors and patients tensed as I passed them in the halls. The nurses were indifferent.

When I reached the designated room for Retrieval, I paused. The door was heavier than the others I'd encountered.

I entered slowly. The room was empty save for a figure on the bed. The windows were closed, but the air conditioner was puffing underneath the sterile cotton curtains, puffing them out like paper clouds. I walked up to the man. He didn't acknowledge me, but instead seemed to relax against his pillows.

"Are you Carl Remmington?" I asked. It was protocol to check. He stretched his fingers out against his paper gown. I could see the joints quiver and labor underneath his skin. He didn't answer.

I checked his chart. His name stood out in strong black letters.

He was.

I was about to touch his forehead, but I stopped again. His eyes were blue and icy. Apart from the determined, serene expression on his face, he seemed just like the others I'd passed by in the street. His hair was white and silver and his complexion pale and sallow, his cheeks were sunken and his shoulders poked out at jagged angles, but he was still a human...

I mean, he was still alive. Thinking about where he was about to wind up and all the things he must have done, I couldn't help but wonder.

"Why are you wicked?" I asked.

He took his eyes from the ceiling and turned his head towards me. His gaze met mine. It pierced me harshly.

"Why are you?"

I stared at him, my wrist hovering just before my chest, below my scarf. I couldn't think. He turned his eyes up again without waiting for an answer, and I extended my arm and placed my fingers on his forehead.

His eyes closed.

< • >

I returned to my post without a word. Needle and Tack looked up from their shoveling. Neither made a comment about my scarf, but they seemed to understand. The cavern was just as damp and chilled as ever. They'd been to Living Earth lots of times before. I suddenly wondered if that was why they always stayed so quiet.

I received the expected acknowledgement from my superior the next morning. The morning after, another Retrieval came up. Needle took it.

The days passed in a rhythm; my shovel was a metronome. My scarf hung about my neck for lack of anything better to do. After about a week, I finally stopped. I watched the flames dance against the grate and splash light against the floor. My feet were cold.

I pulled off my scarf. Needle and Tack shoveled dutifully behind me. The furnace crackled. Stalactites dripped.

I let the fabric feed the fire. 

Backs of leaves

by Diana Scott

Scott

"It's going to storm," you said as leaves turned and twisted in the gray wind. I believed you and held on tighter. Our world was my bed and the window was an excuse to steam up the glass. We sat high on our cloud feeling like gods as we

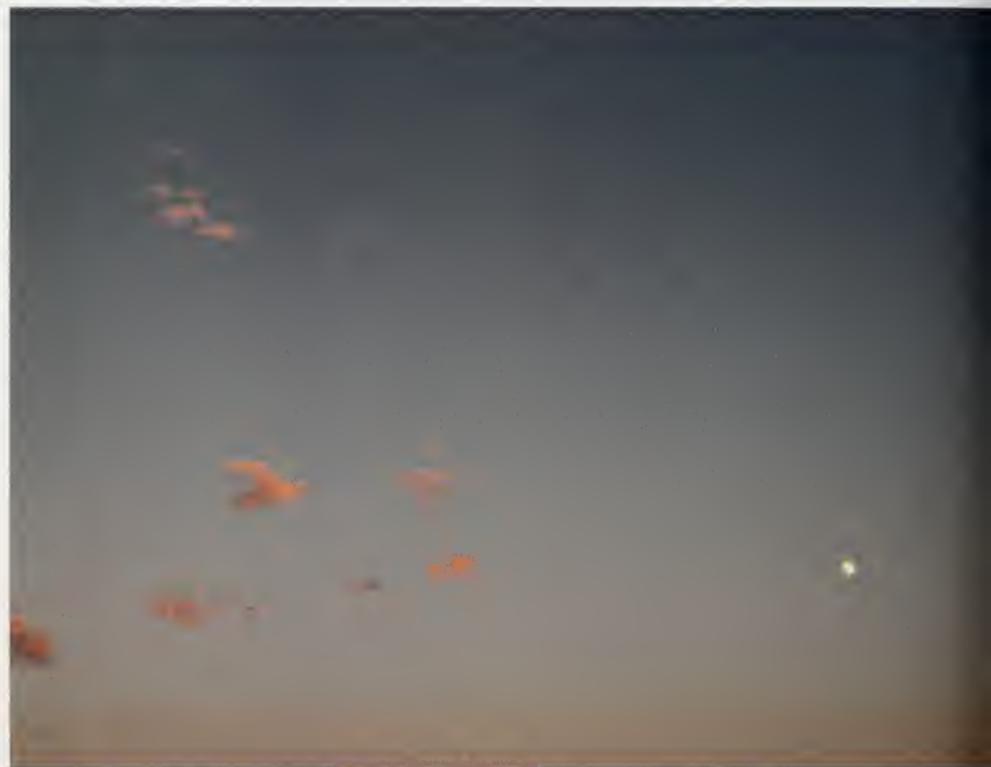
looked to the other side of the panes watching the mortals run for shelter.

Silently the spidery cracks in our world spread as outside the ripping wind exposed the backs of leaves. The impossibly perfect scenario of a universe revolving around us was giving way to the barometric pressure. Outside rain began to fall and we realized that our skin was getting wet.

With authority you said, "It will pass," and I believed your steady hand wiping the rain from my cheek.

Soon thunder began to rattle the bed frame and lightning charred our skin but the curse of optimism wasn't shaken by the growing chaos. Fingers in ears and hands on faces we focused on the swirling shades of our irises and the way things used to be.

The collision refused to be ignored and in the end we chose the peace of surrender. Slowly we drowned in the clutter of our bodies pressed together on my bed a sinking stone the only relic from a time when together we were invincible.



Pastel Sunset by Meredith Roane

Song of Duty & Burden

by Brad Efford

suddenly still on the railing.

On the surfaces of his eyes I see his mother's earnest nature and the wisecracks of his father magnetized to the milky night sky above, to the house of the moon, Brad, look, as he raises an arm, amazed, and it's a mixture of the way he says my name and that he has room for its storage in the cluttered attic his mind is in the first place that ensures its nakedness

in the middle of these verses.

So I stand next to his still frame and place my hands like his
on the smooth white wood of the railing, worn with age,
and catch my breath and a little shakingly shield my eyes
against the brilliance of the moon's bloated night-belly,
and in this moment of unexpected stillness time is just
a suggestion and the two of us - young boy and sitter -
run the world with the hop that, given the moments we have,
we will try our hardest not to run it

straight down, into the ground.

Cover Photography by Charlotte Sandy

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